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— Editorial

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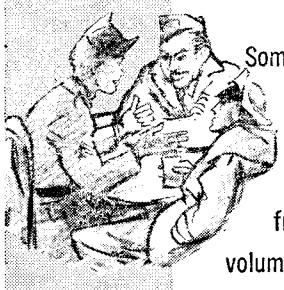

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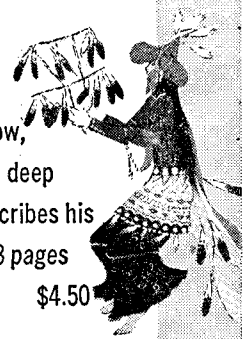

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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-FOURTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

The Death of the Pope

BY THE WORLD at large Pope Pius XII will undoubtedly be most warmly remembered for his concern for the persecuted and neglected and his unflagging efforts for peace. His pontificate opened under the shadow of World War II; within two weeks of his elevation to the See of Peter, Hitler's troops were taking over Czechoslovakia and within six months the invasion of Poland opened the floodgates of an all-out war. The long-sought cessation of these frightful hostilities was immediately followed by a cold war which has continued and was even increasing in intensity when the Pope's long life came to a close. He who strove for peace so untiringly enjoyed few moments when there was real peace in the world. Pius XII experienced great sorrow during his pontificate, especially since he took the appalling sufferings of the victims of war and totalitarianism as his own. At the time of his death some fifty million Catholics lived in nations behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains; many more were in refugee camps.

But if Pius XII was continually saddened by the calamities that befell many million human victims, the war and its aftermath presented manifold opportunities to a Pope as devoted as he was to the well-being of men. When his efforts to prevent the war proved vain he immediately set about mitigating the ravages of the conflict. He sought to keep Italy out of the war and to prevent its spread to other nations and peoples generally. Again and again he appealed to the leaders of both sides to save cities from ruin and spare non-combatants; it is believed that the saving of Paris and Rome from destruction was a result of his efforts. At the same time in his Christmas Messages and elsewhere Pope Pius never ceased in his labors to bring the conflict to a close. The wisdom of his opposition to the Allied objective of "unconditional surrender" has been all too painfully manifest not only through the prolongation of a murderous war but in the resulting failings of the peace settlements.

Pius XII's concern for the victims of war (and tyranny) was ever made clear. When the hostilities broke out he set up an information bureau at the Vatican for the benefit of hundreds of thousands of families of prisoners of war and displaced persons. He used the resources of the Church to minister to countless war victims, sheltered a number of Jewish refugees during the Nazi depredations in Italy and alleviated much human suffering in a material as well as a spiritual way.

THROUGHOUT his pontificate Pius XII focused world attention on the necessary conditions or prerequisites for a just and lasting peace. This provided the theme of his Christmas Messages from 1939 on. He stressed such root causes as the depersonalization of modern man and society, poverty in natural resources and living space, wide disparities in human living standards and other basic socio-economic causes. He spoke of hatred and mistrust between peoples, the burden and threat of armaments, the peril of thermonuclear weapons, the displacement of peoples, the well-endowed, under-populated nations which enforce arbitrary immigration quotas and other formidable obstacles to worldwide security and concord. He advocated a true union of the nations of the world under a regime of law which would be binding upon all peoples and encouraged institutions and groups which were working toward this end in the world.

But if Pius XII emphasized the practical requirements essential if men would build a just and lasting international society, he proclaimed at the same time the specifically Christian elements involved in a true quest for peace. The analyses he made and the remedies he called for flow from traditional Catholic social teaching. He held that peace was not

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possible unless there were a Christian embodiment of the common good within States and between States.

Pius XII's approach to peace in a divided postwar world armed with thermonuclear weapons is indicated by a short excerpt from his 1951 Christmas Message: "We too—and more than anyone else—deplore the monstrous cruelty of modern weapons. We deplore them and do not cease to pray that they may never be employed. But, on the other hand, is it not perhaps a kind of practical materialism and superficial sentimentality to make the existence and threat of these weapons the sole and principal consideration in the question of peace, while no attention is paid to the absence of that Christian order which is the true guarantee of peace . . .?"

Throughout all his labors and anxieties the Pope repeatedly declared that peace could not be achieved in the world through human efforts alone. His trust in Divine Providence never wavered. He continuously invoked Divine aid, and during the darkest days he radiated confidence that the prayers of afflicted humanity would be answered.

The pontificate of Pius XII was notable for more reasons than we have space to cite here. It was marked by many exhortations, not only to the faithful throughout the world, but to all men of good will. Pius XII manifested perhaps even more interest than his immediate predecessor in the great scientific advances of our day and also in the problems they have created.

His proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption, a belief cherished by the Church for centuries, was the most notable religious event of a reign which was marked by papal concern for the devotional development of the people. In *Mediator Dei* and other pronouncements and decrees Pope Pius did much to advance the liturgical movement with its emphasis on full-fledged participation of the laity in the prayer life of the Church. Permission to say evening Mass has enabled many more of the faithful to assist more frequently at the Holy Sacrifice. Shortening of the hours of fasting before Communion has brought about much more widespread partaking of the Blessed Sacrament, thus carrying out the aims of St. Pius X. And his encouragement of the development of a native clergy and hierarchy in mission lands has emphasized the universality of the Catholic Church as perhaps never before in history.

Pius XII has stood out as the common father of mankind in a period of extraordinary human travail. He labored eighteen hours a day in order to minister to the material and spiritual needs of his vast flock. His was a truly historic, as well as a long and highly fruitful pontificate. May he rest in peace.

THIS WEEK

The Death of the Pope 83

Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal
by Thomas Merton 87

The Journey of Thomas Mann
by Richard Gilman 93

Literature and Doctrine
by Daniel J. Callahan 96

When Dew Dropped Silver: A Poem
by Sister Mary Honora, O.S.F. 98

The Screen
by Philip T. Hartung 99

Communications 100

Books 102

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STATEMENTS OF POPE PIUS XII

DEMOCRACY

Peoples have, as it were, reawakened from a long torpor. They have assumed a new, questioning, criticizing, suspicious attitude toward the State and those governing. Taught, as they are, by bitter experience, they oppose with greater impetuosity the monopolization of power by a dictatorial authority which is uncontrollable and intangible; and they ask for a system of government more consistent with the dignity and freedom of citizens.

These restless multitudes, in which the onslaught of war has left the deepest traces, are now filled with the persuasion—vague and confused, perhaps, at first, but now incontrovertible—that, if the possibility of controlling and correcting the action of those in power had not been lacking, the world would not have been dragged into the disastrous hurricane of war; and that, to prevent any such catastrophe in the future, efficacious guarantees must be vested in the people itself.

WAR AND RESTRAINTS

If ever a generation had to feel deep down in its conscience the cry "War on war!" it is certainly the present one. Gone, as it has, through an ocean of blood and tears, such as was perhaps never known in the past, it has lived war's unspeakable atrocities so intensely that the recollection of so many horrors cannot but remain impressed in its memory and in the depths of its soul. . . .

Without doubt the progress of human inventions, which was to mark the crystallization of greater welfare for the whole of humanity, has instead been directed to the destruction of what had been built up by the centuries. But this very thing has rendered more and more evident the immorality of wars of aggression. And if now to the recognition of this immorality there will be added the threat of a judicial intervention of the nations and of a punishment inflicted on the aggressor by the United Nations, so that war may always feel itself proscribed, always under the watchful guard of preventive action, then humanity, issuing from the dark night in which it has been submerged for so great a length of time, will be able to greet the dawn of a new and better era in its history.

THE PRESS

The press must be undeviatingly loyal to the truth, lest its tremendous influence be exercised amiss. The truth of which We speak is the truth in vision, whereby you see events really as they happen, and the truth in presentation, whereby you report faithfully events as you have seen them, and interpret them by no other standards than those of justice and of charity.

Now truth is dispassionate, not partisan; factual, not fanciful. Truth is not venal; it does not fear to be known, but it asks only to be presented in the clear, white light of objectivity, not in any spectral tint of prejudice or conjecture.

JUST DEFENSE

A people threatened with an unjust aggression, or already its victim, may not remain passively indifferent if it would act and think as becomes Christians; all the more does the solidarity of the family of nations forbid others to behave as mere spectators in an attitude of apathetic neutrality. Who will ever measure the harm already caused in the past by such indifference to war of aggression, which is quite alien to the Christian instinct?

One thing, however, is certain: the commandment of peace is a matter of divine law. Its purpose is the protection of the goods of humanity, inasmuch as they are the gifts of the Creator. Among these goods some are of such importance to society that it is perfectly lawful to defend them against unjust aggression. Their defense is even an obligation for the nations as a whole who have a duty not to abandon a nation that is attacked.

WORLD ORGANIZATION

This organization will be vested by common consent with supreme authority and with power to smother in its germinal stages any threat of isolated or collective aggression. No one can hail this development with greater joy than he who has long upheld the principle that the idea of war as an apt and appropriate means of solving international conflicts is now out of date. . . . If there is now the threat that other nations will intervene judicially and inflict chastisement on aggressors, then war will always be subject to the stigma of proscription, will be under surveillance, and will be open to prevention by force.

JUST WAGES

A wage which guarantees the existence of the family, making it possible for parents to fulfill their natural duty of rearing a progeny healthily fed and clothed; a dwelling fit for human beings; the possibility of providing children with sufficient instruction and a suitable education, the possibility of planning and making provision for bad times, sickness, and old age—these are social welfare conditions that must be achieved if we do not want society to be shaken in every season by ferments and dangerous quakings, but to grow quietly and advance in the peace and harmony of mutual love.

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We must not aim at making the life of the individual depend entirely on the will of the State, but rather see to it that the State, whose duty it is to promote the common good, does by means of social institutions such as social security, health insurance, and social welfare integrate, assist, and complement the activity of labor associations, and particularly the endeavors of fathers and mothers who, by their work, secure their own living and that of their children.

SCIENCE

As with every art, every science serves God, because God is *scientiarum dominus*—Master of sciences—and *docet hominem scientiam*—Teacher of sciences to mankind. In His school, man has two textbooks. In the book of the universe, human reason in search of the truth studies the good things made by God; in the book of the Bible, the human intellect and good will search for a truth higher than reason, sublime as the intimate mystery of God, known only to Him. The school of God is the meeting place of philosophy and theology, of the divine word and paleontology, of the division of the light from darkness and astronomy, of the earth set in its appointed place and its rotation around the sun, of the view of God and the view of man.

PRAYER

Devotion is a great virtue that safeguards all the others. But its most beautiful and expressive act is prayer, which, for man, who is body and soul, represents the daily food of the soul just as material bread is the daily nourishment of the body.

Prayer is, first of all, collecting one's thoughts before the Lord. To seek out God, to find Him, it is enough to enter into yourselves, morning, night, or at any moment of the day.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON THE DEATH OF THE POPE

Silenced forever is that comforting voice of father and teacher, which almost daily for close to twenty years, pronounced words of goodness and wisdom. That voice echoed over the mountains and seas to every continent, to the most remote islands, to the entire world.—*Archbishop Amleto G. Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States.*

The entire Christian world will mourn the death of Pope Pius XII. His consecration to the service of making peace among men and nations stands as a permanent contribution to the dignity of the Church he has served so loyally. I pray God to grant rest unto his soul and victory to the peace he sought.—*Rt. Rev. Horace W. B. Donegan, Episcopal Bishop of New York.*

The revered Pontiff will long be remembered for his earnest exertions for peace, for his rescue of many victims of Nazism, for his cordiality towards men and women of all faiths.—*Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, President, Union of American Hebrew Congregations.*

Throughout his long life and to the very end, he served the Christian church with conspicuous ability and devotion. He was held in the greatest respect by all Christians for his saintliness, his character, his single-mindedness and his Christian witness.—*Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury.*

In himself an exemplary character, Pope Pius XII was a skillful leader in his communion and an impressive moral force in the world of our day. —*Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, President, Lutheran World Federation.*

A great spiritual leader is dead. Methodists throughout the world join Christians everywhere in love and sympathy to Roman Catholics in every land.—*Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, President, Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church.*

As a passionate defender of peace and human dignity, Pope Pius XII will have a permanent place in the history of mankind.—*Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, President, Rabbinical Council of America.*

The death of His Holiness Pope Pius XII means the departure from among us of the most impartial, most devoted peacemaker in our weary, warring world. During his long, laborious life of prayer, sacrifice and action, Pius XII dedicated himself totally to the service of God and to the welfare of all the children of God. . . . I am sure that all persons of good will join the Catholic world in mourning the loss of a loving and beloved Holy Father.—*Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York.*

Though not of his Church, we feel that the dedicated life of Pope Pius XII is an example that transcends ecclesiastical boundaries. He ministered to multitudes and strived according to his light and devotion to be a servant of God, a shepherd of Christians in the Papal flock and a kindly guide to all men.—*Dr. Theophilus Mills Taylor, Moderator, and Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, Administrator, United Presbyterian Church.*

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Poetry and Contemplation:
A Reappraisal

by THOMAS MERTON

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Ten years ago I wrote an article called "Poetry and the Contemplative Life" which was published first in The Commonweal and then appeared in a volume of verse, *Figures for an Apocalypse*.

In its original form, this article stated a "problem" and tried to apply a rather crude "solution" which, at the time, was rather widely discussed by people interested in religious verse and, at least by implication, in religious experience. Many of them were inclined to accept the "solution" that was proposed. Others wisely rejected it because of its somewhat puritanical implications.

As time has passed I have found that the confident pronouncements made in my early writing lay more and more heavily on my conscience as a writer and as a priest, and while it is evidently impossible to correct and amend all my wrong-headed propositions, at least I would like to revise the essay of 1948. The revision is unfortunately not fully satisfactory precisely because it is no more than a revision. But I do not want to write a whole new article, approaching the subject from an entirely different angle. I believe it is necessary to revise the earlier article and to restate the case in the same context, arriving at a different conclusion.

One of the unavoidable defects of this kind of revision is that it retains an altogether misleading insistence on the terms "contemplation" and "contemplative life" as something apart from the rest of man's existence. This involves a rather naive presupposition that "contemplation" is a kind of objectivized entity which gets "interfered with" by such things as esthetic reflection. There is a certain amount of truth behind this supposed conflict, but to state it thus crudely is to invite all sorts of misunderstanding. In actual fact, neither religious nor artistic contemplation should be regarded as "things" which happen or "objects" which one can "have." They belong to the much more mysterious realm of what one "is"—or rather "who" one is. Esthetic intuition is not merely the act of a faculty, it is also a heightening and intensification of our personal identity and being by the perception of our connatural affinity with "Being" in the beauty contemplated.

But also, and at the same time, the implied conflict between "contemplation" as rest and poetic creation as activity is even more misleading. It is all wrong to imagine that in order to "contemplate" divine things or what you will, it is necessary to abstain from every kind of action and enter into a kind of spiritual stillness where one waits for "something to happen." In actual fact, true contemplation is inseparable from life and from the dynamism of life—which includes work, creation, production, fruitfulness and above all *love*. Contemplation is not to be thought of as a separate department of life, cut off from all man's other interests and superseding them. It is the very fullness of a fully integrated life. It is the crown of life and of all life's activities.

Therefore the earlier problem was, largely, an illusion, created by this division of life into formally separate compartments, of "action" and "contemplation." But because this crude division was stated so forcefully and so frequently in my earlier writings, I feel that it is most necessary now to try to do something to heal this wound and draw together the two sides of this unfortunate fissure.

In this present article, the wound is still evident, and it is meant to be so. I am attempting to patch it up, and probably do not fully succeed. If this is true, I do not care so much, as long as it is clear that I am stitching and drawing the wound together, pouring in the disinfectant, and putting on a bandage.

IT WOULD BE difficult to say why many who could be contemplatives in the strict sense of the word, never actually reach the end of their vocation on earth. The answer lies hidden in the mystery of each individual vocation. Contemplation is a gift of God, which He sometimes gives to those who have done less to prepare themselves, and refuses to some who have suffered and prayed and labored much to obtain it. Normally, we might think that a desire for contemplative union with God, and a certain aptitude for the contemplative life, a taste for silence and prayer, a love for the Cross, would be a good indication of a contemplative vocation. And indeed these factors are important. But they do not, of themselves, give us a strict right to expect this great gift. Indeed, the more one feels that he has "deserved" the gift, the less likely he is to receive it in any fullness. It is, in fact, those who seem to think that the gift of contemplation can be earned by their own efforts, who sometimes end by becoming false mystics, unless God, in His mercy, teaches them the wisdom and the humility of the Cross!

The contemplative life is a life entirely occupied with God—with love and knowledge of God. It can be considered from three points of view, as it were in three degrees. There is first of all possible a kind of natural contemplation of God—that of the artist, the philosopher, and of the primitive or non-Christian religions. Then there is the contemplative life in the usual sense of the word: a life in which a baptized Christian, making full use of all the means which the Church puts at his disposal—Sacraments, Liturgy, penance, prayer, meditation, spiritual reading and so on—strives to conform his will with

Thomas Merton is Father Louis, O.C.S.O., a Trappist monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky and author of many books, among them *Bread In the Wilderness*, *Seven Storey Mountain*, and the recently published *Thoughts in Solitude* (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy).

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God's will and to see and love God in all things and thus to dispose himself for union with Him. This is *active* contemplation, in which grace indeed is the principle of all the supernatural value and ordination of our acts, but in which much of the initiative belongs to our own powers, prompted and sustained by grace. This form of the contemplative life prepares us for contemplation properly so called: the life of *infused* or *passive* or *mystical* contemplation.

Contemplation is the fullness of the Christian vocation —the full flowering of baptismal grace and of the Christ-life in our souls.

Christian contemplation is not something esoteric and dangerous. It is simply the experience of God that is given to a soul purified by humility and faith. It is the "knowledge" of God in the darkness of infused love. "This is eternal life, that they should know Thee, the One True God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3) or "But we all, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:18). St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, rebuked those who clung to the "first elements of the words of God" when they should have been "Masters," and he urged them to relinquish the "milk" of beginners and to desire the "strong meat" of the perfect, which is the contemplation of Christ in the great Mystery in which He renews on earth the redemptive sacrifice of the Cross. "For every one that is a partaker of milk is unskillful in the word of justice: for he is a little child. But strong meat is for the perfect: for them who by custom have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil" (Hebrews 5:13-14). *Omnis qui ad Dominum convertitur contemplativam vitam desiderat,* said St. Gregory the Great, and he was using contemplation in our sense: to live on the desire of God alone; to have one's mind divested of all earthly things and united, insofar as human weakness permits, with Christ. And he adds that the contemplative life begins on earth in order to continue, more perfectly, in heaven. St. Thomas echoed him with his famous phrase: *quaedam inchoatio beatitudinis* (Contemplation is a beginning of eternal blessedness). St. Bonaventure goes further than any of the other Doctors of the Church in his insistence that all Christians should desire union with God in loving contemplation. And in his second conference on the Hexaemeron, applying Christ's words in Matthew 12:42, he says that the Queen of the South who left her own land and traveled far to hear the wisdom of Solomon will rise up in judgment against our generation which refuses the treasures of divine wisdom, preferring the far lesser riches of worldly wisdom and philosophy.

INFUSED contemplation is a quasi-experimental knowledge of God's goodness "tasted" and "possessed" by a vital contact in the depths of the soul. By infused love, we are given an immediate grasp of God's own substance, and rest in the obscure and profound sense of His presence and transcendent actions within our inmost selves, yielding ourselves altogether to the work of His transforming Spirit.

By the light of infused wisdom we enter deeply into the Mystery of Christ Who is Himself the light of men. We participate, as it were, in the glory that is radiated mystically by His risen and transfigured Humanity. Our eyes are opened to understand the Scriptures and the mystery of God's intervention in man's history. We become aware of the way in which the infinite mercy and wisdom of God are revealed to men and angels in the Mystery of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. The contemplative life is the lot of those who have entered most fully into the life and spirit of the Church, so that the contemplatives are at the very heart of the Mystery which they have begun really to understand and to "see" with the eyes of their soul. To desire the contemplative life and its gifts is therefore to desire to become in the highest sense a fruitful and strong member of Christ. But it means also, by that very fact, to desire and accept a share in His sufferings and death, that we may rise with Him in the participation of His glory.

Now whether we speak of contemplation as active or passive, one thing is evident: it brings us into the closest contact with the one subject that is truly worthy of a Christian poet: the great Mystery of God, revealing His mercy to us in Christ. The Christian poet should be one who has been granted a deep understanding of the ways of God and of the Mystery of Christ. Deeply rooted in the spiritual consciousness of the whole Church, steeped in the Liturgy and the Scriptures, fully possessed by the "mind of the Church," he becomes as it were a voice of the Church and of the Holy Spirit, and sings again the *magnalia Dei,* praising God and pointing out the wonder of His ways. The Christian poet is therefore the successor to David and the Prophets, he contemplates what was announced by the poets of the Old Testament: he should be, as they were, a mystic, full of divine fire. He should be one who, like the prophet Isaias, has seen the living God and has lamented the fact that he was a man of impure lips, until God Himself sent Seraph, with a live coal from the altar of the heavenly temple, to burn his lips with prophetic inspiration.

In the true Christian poet—in Dante, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis, Jacopone da Todi, Hopkins, Paul Claudel—we find it hard to distinguish between the inspiration of the prophet and mystic, and the purely poetic enthusiasm of great artistic genius.

Consider also what a tremendous mine of literary inspiration is in the Liturgical life. The Liturgy itself contains the greatest literature, not only from Scripture, but from the genius of the Patristic and Middle Ages. The Liturgy stands at the crossroads of the natural and supernatural lives, and exploits all the possibilities of both in order to bring out every possible meaning and implication that is in them with respect to our salvation and the praise of God. It surrounds those founts of all supernatural vitality, the Sacraments, with a music that is perfect in its integrity and dignity, and with ceremonies that are most meaningful by reason of their tremendous, dramatic simplicity, not to mention all the resources of pictorial and plastic art still unknown in this land which has never yet possessed a Chartres or an Assisi.

THE LITURGY is, then, not only a school of literary taste and a mine of marvelous subjects, but it is infinitely more: it is a sacramental system built around the greatest Sacrament, the Blessed Eucharist, in which Christ Himself is enthroned, in mystery, in the very heart of His wonderful creation.

Christ on the Cross is the fount of all art because He is the Word, the fount of all grace and wisdom. He is the center of everything, of the whole economy of the natural and the supernatural orders. Everything that is made subsists in Him and reflects His beauty. Everything points to this anointed King of Creation Who is the

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splendor of the eternal light and the mirror of the Godhead without stain. He is the "image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature . . . in Him were all things created, by Him and in Him . . . He is before all and by Him all things consist . . . in Whom it hath pleased the Father that all things should dwell . . . for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally," that in all things He may hold the primacy. (Colossians, 1 and 2.)

The Christian's vision of the world ought, by its very nature, to have in it something of poetic inspiration. Our faith ought to be capable of filling our hearts with a wonder and a wisdom which see beyond the surface of things and events, and grasp something of the inner and "sacred" meaning of the cosmos which, in all its movements and all its aspects, sings the praises of its Creator and Redeemer.

No Christian poetry worthy of the name has been written by anyone who was not in some degree a contemplative. I say "in some degree" because obviously not all Christian poets are mystics. But the true poet is always akin to the mystic because of the "prophetic" intuition by which he sees the spiritual reality, the inner meaning of the object he contemplates, which makes that concrete reality not only a thing worthy of admiration in itself, but also and above all makes it a *sign of God.* All good Christian poets are then contemplatives in the sense that they see God everywhere in His creation and in His mysteries, and behold the created world as filled with signs and symbols of God. To the true Christian poet, the whole world and all the incidents of life tend to be sacraments—signs of God, signs of His love working in the world.

However, the mere fact of having this contemplative vision of God in the world around us does not necessarily make a man a great poet. One must be not a "seer" but also and especially a "creator"—a "maker." Poetry is an art, a natural skill, a virtue of the practical intellect, and no matter how great a subject we may have in the experience of contemplation, we will not be able to put it into words if we do not have the proper command of our medium. That is true. But let us assume that a man already has this natural gift. If the inspiration is helpless without a correspondingly effective technique, technique is barren without inspiration.

CHRIST is the inspiration of Christian poetry, and Christ is at the center of the contemplative life. Therefore, it would seem fairly evident that the one thing that will most contribute to the perfection of Catholic literature in general and poetry in particular will be for our writers and poets to live more as "contemplatives" than as citizens of a materialistic world. This means first of all leading the full Christian sacramental and liturgical life insofar as they can in their state. Obviously, the poet does not have to enter a monastery to be a better poet. On the contrary, what we need are "contemplatives" outside the cloister and outside the rigidly fixed patterns of religious life—contemplatives in the world of art, letters, education, and even politics. This means a solid integration of one's work, thought, religion, and family life and recreations in one vital harmonious unity with Christ at its center. The liturgical life is the most obvious example of "active contemplation," but it is hard enough to find a parish where the liturgical life is anything more than a bare skeleton. And even then, the liturgist is sometimes liable to be a "faddist" with narrow and obsessional views, striving to subject everyone else to certain esoteric tastes of his own. Such deviations should not prejudice us against the immense vitality and permanent value of the liturgical revival. It is quite certain that the most valid achievements in the realm of Christian art in our time are to the credit of the Monks of Solesmes, with their revival of Gregorian chant.

A sincere and efficacious desire to enter more deeply into the beauty of the Christian mystery implies a willingness to sacrifice the things which are called "beautiful" by the decadent standards of a materialistic world. Yet the Christian contemplative need not confine himself to religious, still less to professionally "pious" models. He will, of course, read Scripture and above all the contemplative saints: John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, John Ruysbroek, Bonaventure, Bernard. But no one can be a poet without reading the good poets of his own time—T. S. Eliot, Auden, Spender, Rilke, Garcia-Lorca. One might add that a fully integrated vision of our time and of its

A PSALM

When psalms surprise me with their music
And antiphons turn to rum
The Spirit sings: the bottom drops out of my soul

And from the center of my cellar, Love, louder than thunder
Opens a heaven of naked air.

New eyes awaken.
I send Love's name into the world with wings
And songs grow up around me like a jungle.
Choirs of all creatures sing the tunes
Your Spirit played in Eden.
Zebras and antelopes and birds of paradise
Shine on the face of the abyss
And I am drunk with the great wilderness
Of the sixth day in Genesis.

But sound is never half so fair
As when that music turns to air
And the universe dies of excellence.

Sun, moon and stars
Fall from their heavenly powers.
Joys walk no longer down the blue world's shore.

Though fires loiter, lights still fly on the air of the gulf
All fear another wind, another thunder:
Then one more voice
Snuffs all their flares in one gust.

And I go forth with no more wine and no more stars
And no more buds and no more Eden
And no more animals and no more sea:
While God sings by Himself in acres of night
And walls fall down, that guarded Paradise.

Thomas Merton.

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spirit presupposes some contact with the genius of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, who are Christians turned inside out.

Contemplation has much to offer poetry. And poetry, in its turn, has something to offer contemplation. How is this so? In understanding the relation of poetry to contemplation the first thing that needs to be stressed is the essential dignity of esthetic experience. It is, in itself, a very high gift, though only in the natural order. It is a gift which very many people have never received, and which others, having received, have allowed to spoil or become atrophied within them through neglect and misuse.

To many people, the enjoyment of art is nothing more than a sensible and emotional thrill. They look at a picture, and if it stimulates one or another of their sense-appetites they are pleased. On a hot day they like to look at a picture of mountains or the sea because it makes them feel cool. They like paintings of dogs that you could almost pat. But naturally they soon tire of art, under those circumstances. They turn aside to pat a real dog, or they go down the street to an air-conditioned movie, to give their senses another series of jolts. This is not what one can legitimately call the "enjoyment of Art."

A GENUINE esthetic experience is something which transcends not only the sensible order (in which, however, it has its beginning) but also that of reason itself. It is a supra-rational intuition of the latent perfection of things. Its immediacy outruns the speed of reasoning and leaves all analysis far behind. In the natural order, as Jacques Maritain has often insisted, it is an analogue of the mystical experience which it resembles and imitates from afar. Its mode of apprehension is that of "connaturality"—it reaches out to grasp the inner reality, the vital substance of its object, by a kind of affective identification of itself with it. It rests in the perfection of things by a kind of union which sometimes resembles the quiescence of the soul in its immediate affective contact with God in the obscurity of mystical prayer. A true artist can contemplate a picture for hours, and it is a real contemplation, too. So close is the resemblance between these two experiences that a poet like Blake could almost confuse the two and make them merge into one another as if they belonged to the same order of things. And yet there is an abyss between them.

This resemblance between the experiences of the artist and of the mystic has been extensively discussed in the long and important article on "Art and Spirituality," by Fr. M. Leonard, S. J., in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité.*

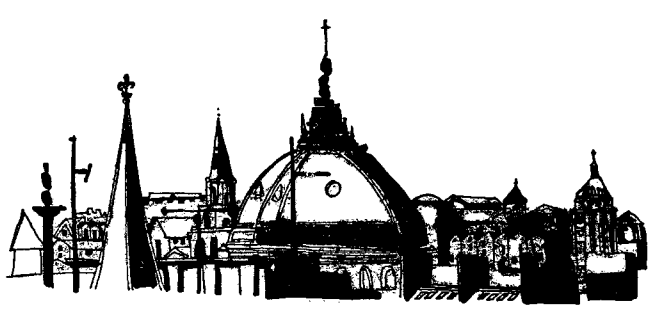
This theologian pushes the dignity of the esthetic institution practically to its limit. He gives it everything that it is ontologically able to stand. He insists that the highest experience of the artist penetrates not only beyond the sensible surface of things into their inmost reality, but even beyond that to God Himself. More than that, the analogy with mystical experience is deeper and closer still because, he says, the intuition of the artist sets in motion the very same psychological processes which accompany infused contemplation. This would seem to be too much: but no, it is not. It fits in with the psychology of St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure and the latter's notion of contemplation *per speculum,* passing through the mirror of created things to God, even if that mirror may happen to be our own soul. It also fits in with the ideas of the Greek Fathers about *theoria physica* or "natural contemplation" which arrives at God through the inner spiritual reality (the *logos*) of the created thing.

The Augustinian psychology, which forms the traditional substratum of Christian mystical theology in the Western Church, distinguishes between an *inferior* and *superior* soul. Of course, this is only a manner of speaking. There is only one soul, a simple spiritual substance, undivided and indivisible. And yet the soul insofar as it acts through its faculties, making decisions and practical judgments concerning temporal external things, is called "inferior." The "superior" soul is the same soul, but now considered as the principle or *actus primus* of these other diverse and multiple acts of the faculties which as it were flow from this inner principle. Only the superior soul is strictly the image of God within us. And if we are to contemplate God at all, this internal image must be re-formed by grace, and then we must enter into this inner sanctuary which is the substance of the soul itself. This passage from the exterior to the interior has nothing to do with concentration or introspection. It is a transit from objectivization to knowledge by intuition and connaturality. The majority of people never enter into this inward self, which is an abode of silence and peace and where the diversified activities of the intellect and will are collected, so to speak, into one intense and smooth and spiritualized activity which far exceeds in its fruitfulness the plodding efforts of reason working on external reality with its analyses and syllogisms.

IT IS HERE that mystical contemplation begins. It is into this substance or "center" of the soul, when it has transcended its dependence on sensations and images and concepts, that the obscure light of infused contemplation will be poured by God, giving us experimental contact with Himself without the medium of sense species. And in this contact, we are no longer facing God as an "object" of experience or as a concept which we apprehend. We are united to Him in the mystery of love and its transcendent subjectivity, and see Him in ourselves by losing ourselves in Him.

Yet even in the natural order, without attaining to God in us, and without perceiving this "inner spiritual light," the esthetic experience introduces us into the interior sanctuary of the soul and to its inexpressible simplicity. For the esthetic intuition is also beyond objectivity—it "sees" by identifying itself spiritually with what it contemplates.

Obviously, then, when the natural contemplation of the artist or the metaphysician has already given a man a taste of the peaceful intoxication which is experienced in the supra-rational intuitions of this interior self, the way is already well prepared for infused contemplation. And if God should grant that grace, the person so favored will be much better prepared to recognize it, and to cooperate with God's action within him. And this, as a matter of fact, is a tremendous advantage. The artist, the poet, the metaphysician is, then, in some sense already



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naturally prepared and disposed to remove some of the principal obstacles to the light of infused contemplation. He will be less tempted than the ordinary man to reach out for vulgar satisfactions and imaginable thrills. He will be more ready to keep himself detached from the level of crude feeling and emotionalism which so easily corrupt the integrity both of the artist and of the man of prayer. The mere fact of the artist's or poet's good taste, which should belong to him by virtue of his art, will help him to avoid some of the evils that tend to corrupt religious experience before it has a chance to take root and grow in the soul.

MYSTICAL contemplation is absolutely beyond the reach of man's natural activity. There is nothing he can do to obtain it by himself. It is a pure gift of God. God gives it to whom He wills, and in the way and degree in which He wills. By cooperating with the work of ordinary grace we can—and, if we really mean to love God, we must—seek Him and even find Him obscurely by a love that gropes humbly in the darkness of this life. But no amount of generosity on our part, no amount of effort, no amount of sacrifice will make us into mystics. That is a work that must be done by God acting as the "principal agent" (the term is that of St. John of the Cross). If He is the principal agent, there is another agent: ourselves. But our part is simply to consent, to listen and to follow without knowing where we are going. All the rest that we can do amounts to the more or less negative task of avoiding obstacles and keeping our own prejudiced judgments and self-will out of His way. St. Bonaventure tells us in many places that prayer and ardent desire can persuade God to give us this gift, and that *industria* on our part can open the way for His action. The term *industria* stands for active purification, and St. Bonaventure means, by that, precisely the same thing that St. John of the Cross talks about all through the "Ascent of Mount Carmel," namely the active emptying of the soul, clearing it of all images, all likenesses of and attachments to created things so that it may be clean and pure to receive the obscure light of God's own presence. The soul must be stripped of all its selfish desires for natural satisfactions, no matter how high, how noble or how excellent in themselves. As long as it rests in things for their own sake, seen and possessed as "objects" to gratify our own self-love, it cannot possess God and be possessed by Him, for the love of the soul for objectivized beings is darkness in the sight of God.

It is the common doctrine of Christian mystical theologians that a great obstacle to "unitive" or "connatural" or "affective" knowledge of God by infused contemplation (the terms are those of St. Thomas and his followers) is attachment to human reasoning and analysis and discourse that proceeds by abstraction from sense images, and by syllogizing, to conclusions. In other words, a man cannot at the same time fly in an airplane and walk along the ground. He must do one or the other. And if he insists on walking along the ground—all right, it is no sin. But it will take him much longer and cost him much more effort to get to his destination, and he will have a much more limited view of things along his way. What the Holy Spirit demands of the mystic is peaceful consent, and a blind trust in Him: for all this time, since the soul does not act of itself, it remains blind and in darkness, having no idea where it is going or what is being done, and tasting satisfaction that is, at first, extremely tenuous and ineffable and obscure. The reason is, of course, that the soul is not yet sufficiently spiritualized to be able to grasp and appreciate what is going on within it. It remains with nothing but the vaguest and most general sense that God is really and truly present and working there—a sense which is fraught with a greater certitude than anything it has ever experienced before. And yet if one stops to analyze the experience, or if one makes a move to increase its intensity by a natural act, the whole thing will evade his grasp and he will lose it altogether.

NOW IT IS precisely here that the esthetic instinct changes its colors and, from being a precious gift, becomes a real danger. If the intuition of the poet naturally leads him into the inner sanctuary of his soul, it is for a special purpose in the natural order: when the poet enters into himself, it is in order to reflect upon his inspiration and to clothe it with a special and splendid form and then return to *display it to those outside*. And here the radical difference between the artist and the mystic begins to be seen. The artist enters into himself in order to *work*. For him, the "superior" soul is a forge where inspiration kindles a fire of white heat, a crucible for the transformation of natural images into new, created forms. But the mystic enters into himself, not in order to work but to pass through the center of his own soul and lose himself in the mystery and secrecy and infinite, transcendent reality of God living and working within him.

Consequently, if the mystic happens to be, at the same time, an artist, when prayer calls him within himself to the secrecy of God's presence, his art will be tempted to start working and producing and studying the "creative" possibilities of this experience. And therefore immediately the whole thing runs the risk of being frustrated and destroyed. The artist will run the risk of losing a gift of tremendous supernatural worth, in order to perform a work of far less value. He will let go of the deep, spiritual grace which has been granted him, in order to return to the reflection of that grace within his own soul. He will withdraw from the mystery of identification with Reality beyond forms and objectivized concepts, and will return to the realm of subject and object. He will objectivize his own experience and seek to exploit and employ it for its own sake. He will leave God and return to himself, and in so doing, though he follows his natural instinct to "create" he will, in fact, be less creative. For the creative work done directly in the soul and on the soul by God Himself, the infinite *Creator Spiritus,* is beyond all comparison with the work which the soul of man itself accomplishes in imitation of the divine Creator. Unable fully to lose himself in God, doomed by the restlessness of talent to seek himself in the highest natural gift that God has given him, the artist falls from contemplation and returns to himself as artist. Instead of passing through his own soul into the abyss of the infinite actuality of God Himself, he will remain there a moment, only to emerge again into the exterior world of multiple created things whose variety once more dissipates his energies until they are lost in perplexity and dissatisfaction.

There is, therefore, a likelihood that one who has the natural gift of artistic intuition and creation may be unable to pass on to the superior and most spiritual kind of contemplation, in which the soul rests in God without images, without concepts, without any intermediary. The artist may be like the hare in the fable, who far outstrips the tortoise without talent in the beginnings of the contemplative life, but who, in the end, is left behind. In a

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word, natural gifts and talents may be of great value in the beginning, but contemplation can never depend on them. They may, indeed, prove to be obstacles, unless by some special grace we are completely detached from them. And so the artist may well receive the first taste of infused prayer, for, as St. John of the Cross says, that is granted to relatively many souls, and often quite soon in their spiritual life, especially where conditions are favorable: but, because of this tragic promethean tendency to exploit every experience as material for "creation" the artist may remain there all his life on the threshold, never entering into the banquet, but always running back into the street to tell the passers-by of the wonderful music he has heard coming from inside the palace of the King!

WHAT, THEN, is the conclusion? That poetry can, indeed, help to bring us rapidly through that early part of the journey to contemplation that is called active: but when we are entering the realm of true contemplation, where eternal happiness is tasted in anticipation, poetic intuition may ruin our rest in God "beyond all images."

In such an event, one might at first be tempted to say that there is only one course for the poet to take, if he wants to be a mystic or a saint: he must consent to the *ruthless and complete sacrifice of his art.* Such a conclusion would seem to be dictated by logic. If there is an infinite distance between the gifts of nature and those of grace, between the natural and the supernatural order, man and God, then should not one always reject the natural for the supernatural, the temporal for the eternal, the human for the divine? It seems to be so simple as to defy contradiction. And yet, when one has experience in the strange vicissitudes of the inner life, and when one has seen something of the ways of God, one remembers that there is a vast difference between the logic of men and the logic of God. There is indeed no human logic in the ways of interior prayer, only Divine paradox. Our God is not a Platonist. Our Christian spirituality is not the intellectualism of Plotinus or the asceticism of the stoics. We must therefore be very careful of oversimplifications. The Christian is sanctified not merely by always making the choice of "the most perfect thing." Indeed, experience teaches us that the most perfect choice is not always that which is most perfect in itself. The most perfect choice is *the choice of what God has willed for us,* even though it may be, in itself, less perfect, and indeed less "spiritual."

It is quite true that esthetic experience is only a temporal thing, and like all other temporal things it passes away. It is true that mystical prayer enriches man a hundredfold in time and in eternity. It purifies the soul and loads it with supernatural merits, enlarging man's powers and capacities to absorb the infinite rivers of divine light which will one day be his beatitude. The sacrifice of art would seem to be a small enough price to lay down for this "pearl of great price."

But let us consider for a moment whether the Christian contemplative poet is necessarily confronted with an absolute clean-cut "either/or" choice between "art" and "mystical prayer."

It can of course happen that a contemplative and artist finds himself in a situation in which he is morally certain that God demands of him the sacrifice of his art, in order that he may enter more deeply into the contemplative life. In such a case, the sacrifice must be made, not because this is a general law binding all artist-contemplatives, but because it is the will of God in this particular, concrete case.

BUT IT MAY equally well happen that an artist who imagines himself to be called to the higher reaches of mystical prayer is not called to them at all. It becomes evident, to him, that the simplest and most obvious thing for him is to be an artist, and that he should sacrifice his aspirations for a deep mystical life and be content with the lesser gifts with which he has been endowed by God. For such a one, to insist on spending long hours in prayer frustrating his creative instinct would, in fact, lead to illusion. His efforts to be a contemplative would be fruitless. Indeed, he would find that by being an artist—and at the same time living fully all the implications of art for a Christian and for a contemplative in the broad sense of the word—he would enjoy a far deeper and more vital interior life, with a much richer appreciation of the mysteries of God, than if he just tried to bury his artistic talent and be a professional "saint." If he is called to be an artist, then his art will lead him to sanctity, if he uses it as a Christian should.

To take yet another case: it might conceivably be the will of God—as it certainly was in the case of the Old Testament Prophets and in that of St. John of the Cross—that a man should remain *at the same time a mystic and a poet* and ascend to the greatest heights of poetic creation and of mystical prayer without any evident contradiction between them. Here again, the problem is solved not by the application of some abstract, *a priori* principle, but purely by a practically practical appeal to the will of God in this particular case. We are dealing with gifts of God, which God can give as He pleases, when He pleases, to whom He pleases. It is futile for us to lay down laws which say when or how God's gifts must be given, to whom they can be given, to whom they must be refused. It remains true that at a certain point in the interior life, the instinct to create and communicate enters into conflict with the call to mystical union with God. But God Himself can resolve the conflict. And He does. Nor does He need any advice from us in order to do so.

The Christian life is the life of Christ in the soul. Christian wisdom is the wisdom of God's only-begotten Son, Who is begotten Wisdom—*sapientia genita.* To be wise with the wisdom of Christ, we must let Christ be born and live within us in His own way. He does not come to all in the same way, because we all have different functions in His Mystical Body. "There are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit, and there are diversities of ministries but the same Lord: and there are diversities of operations, but the same God Who worketh all in all. And the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man unto profit." (I Corinthians 12:4-7).

We may apply the last words of this text to our present case. If the Christian poet is truly a Christian poet, if he has a vocation to make known to other men the unsearchable mystery of the love of Christ, then he must do so in the Spirit of Christ. And his "manifestation of the Spirit" not only springs from a kind of contemplative intuition of the mystery of Christ, but is "given to him for his profit" and will therefore deepen and perfect his union with Christ. The Christian poet and artist is one who grows not only by his contemplation but also by his open declaration of the mercy of God. If it is clear that he is called to give this witness to God, then he can say with St. Paul: "Woe to me if I preach not the Gospel." At the same time, he should always remember that the hidden and more spiritual gifts are infinitely greater than his art, and if he is called upon to make an exclusive choice of one or the other, he must know how to sacrifice his art.

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The circle had already been closed when he wrote his last word

The Journey of Thomas Mann

by RICHARD GILMAN

IT WAS FITTING that Thomas Mann should have lived to such an accredited age, the age of tribal heads and wizards, but not that death should have taken him unawares. His daughter tells us that he died during the sleep into which he had fallen after the last in a series of crises. It was, we can think, the seal of irony on the life of the great ironist, who, with his habitual gaze half on death, must surely have expected to be wholly wakeful when the mysterium magnum revealed itself.

Up to then, almost to the last days of the last illness, Erica Mann says (in *The Last Year of Thomas Mann.* Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $3.50.), her father lived much as he had always done—working, preparing, a complex and methodical man who had come to consider himself as in a sense his own caretaker. He saw *Felix Krull* published, finished an essay on Chekhov and began a play based on Luther's wedding, delivered his famous Schiller speech at Stuttgart. He sat watching the sea off the Dutch coast, wrapped in blankets, in the posture of so many of his characters—Castorp on the balcony, Aschenbach by the lagoon. And one night, Erica tells us with affection, he stole downstairs to play like a child with his eightieth-birthday presents heaped up in the library.

Earlier he had confessed to her that as he had grown very old "a great cloud of anxiety and melancholy" had come to overshadow him. But it lifted, she writes, like "the evening mist . . . when the sky and the night have made friends." Did he then remember Goethe's words about the happiness a man must feel whose life at the end comes round to its beginning? After the exile, the homecoming banquet; after the responsibility, the gifts on the table.

He had gone back to Europe, though Erica doesn't say it, in obedience to some such possibility. And having once said that he had never taken up a theme that did not have its imaginative roots in his childhood, should he be surprised now to see the earliest cities and landscapes of his art re-composing themselves around him—Lubeck, Munich, the alchemist's mountains of Switzerland? He is at home there as nowhere else, and we are easy with him in that first sensual milieu: Europe of the North, Europe of the gray coasts, the burgher mansions, the heavy furniture, the sanatoriums, snow, stethoscopes, the devil in an old book.

There all his secret, never-dispatched obsessions were born, the skating on thin ice, the tight-rope over the abyss. We see him clipping his cigar (a Maria Mancini?), adjusting the microphone in a lecture-hall or the lap-robe over his knees as his car heads soberly along the autobahn, and he is a man as unfamiliar with dangerous surfaces or chasms as it is possible to imagine. Yet he is only one of his own disguises, and we see through it, discovering the doubt behind the gesture, the loophole beneath the parapet. Europe is the place of his uneasiness, his holy creative unrest, which is why he is truly at home there.

HE MANAGED always to get by through a detailed scheme of practical life which kept him the vital distance from his art. Art is nothingness, a curse, enslavement; loving it nevertheless, one has to throw out a life-line to the other shore. And this is why we are so moved by the way that in the end the line breaks and he becomes one of his own characters —the last days lying in a white hospital room in the high Swiss air, the fatal mysterious circulatory ailment that has the doctors pondering the unfathomability of the body.

Still, we know this has nothing to do with what is permanent, that the circle had already been closed when he wrote his last word. This memoir of Thomas Mann's last year and death, once we have recovered from the personal in it, should lead us back to the more than public, to the autonomous transfigured and transfiguring life of his art.

It escapes us, as most recent art does, as soon as we try to give it a name that will serve for everything. What can we call this art that contemplates the world and itself in the same ironical light, that mistrusts its own achievements, likes to disappear into itself and re-emerge as its own parody and critique? Art has never been more resistant to the categorical than it is today, and Thomas Mann's is among the most obdurate.

Mr. Gilman has contributed poetry and criticism to the *Chicago Review, Poetry,* and other magazines.

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We have to begin by reminding ourselves that ours is an age that asks the meaning of meaning, and does it because we are no longer certain of anything. Epistemology has come to matter more than ontology, the science of science and the philosophy of philosophy take precedence, in minds aware of the abyss, over science and philosophy themselves. In the same way art has come to be concerned with itself; it is partly its own subject matter, and only ruefully, clandestinely, though also heroically—as an affirmation in the teeth of the absurd—does "life" enter its structures.

Yet life is of course art's life, the data for its question, the presentation for its representation as well as that which it wishes to bring to self-knowledge. The heroism of artists like Mann lies in continuing in the face of the paradox to ask questions of a world that is all question, and in striving for form against a steady lapsing back into chaos. And if he protects himself through parody from the exhausted hand of esthetic tradition, through critique from the inability of anything to stand by itself today, and though irony from making an exclusive commitment in a world of fragments, it is in order to be able to transcend these means and thereby attain the image of truth that in other ages could issue more directly and self-confidently from the work.

Parody, critique and irony are what determine the approaches to Mann's art, its defenses, like the moat around a castle. They are partly its temporary condition, induced by the age, but in another sense they are there because of the way in which Mann conceived the creative function in its perennial aspect. A risky business, a "sword-dance," art exposes its practitioner to the loss of his own being: dwelling in possibility, he cuts himself off from actuality; siding with spirit in the work of raising up nature, he incurs the latter's vengeance.

But this plight of the artist is a reflection of a deeper cleavage within existence itself—the tension between nature and spirit, phenomenon and idea. So that to ask questions about art is to ask them about life, to be concerned with the conflict between artist and bourgeois is to grasp, in that particular manifestation, the more comprehensive duality of what Mann called "the upper and the lower world," by which he meant something more structural than moral.

IN THE LIGHT of this, Mann's work is, after all, about the relationship of art and life, but not only in the way that all art is self-conscious today, and certainly not in the narrow sense of a choice or permanent antithesis. His writing aims to recover those hidden depths where art and life, having recognized their reciprocity, can no longer choose to be alone. For Mann, to create is to both partake in and reflect the deepest condition of existence: art is both action and result, awareness and self-awareness, symbol and thing symbolized.

A learned student of German literature and thought who holds substantially this view of Thomas Mann has elaborated it into what his publishers claim is the first definitive study of Mann in English (*The Ironic German: A Study of Thomas Mann.* By Erich Heller. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $6.). It isn't the first—Fritz Kaufmann's *Thomas Mann* was issued last year—but it is remarkably thorough.

Erich Heller knows what he is about, and knows that he knows—if he lacks anything it is the capacity to refrain from scoring critical points. Nevertheless, he is sound and original, and we can rely on him to provide the background of German metaphysics which most of us to one degree or another lack, yet which Mann demands of us.

Thomas Mann has told us how dazzled and overwhelmed he was when he first read Schopenhauer. What he seized on was the philosopher's teaching about the enmity between life and spirit—the world-as-will and the world-as-idea—with its corollary notion of the worthlessness of the real and the unreality of the valuable, and its emphasis on the work of art, in its capacity as pure and eternal form, as the way out of the contradiction.

Buddenbrooks, Heller shows, is Schopenhauerian almost throughout, an imaginative structure sustained and informed by a pessimistic metaphysics. Schopenhauer has taught that the crisis in man arises when he emerges from unreflective nature and begins to reflect upon himself and the world. Against the dangerous claims of this emancipated consciousness man throws up tradition, the "agreement not to ask questions," and a conflict, fatal to both sides, is joined. Tradition, life or the world cannot exist without knowledge, or spirit, while spirit needs world, needs an incarnation.

The Buddenbrook family declines because of the growth of consciousness in its successive generations. The founder is solid and untroubled but in his son spirit makes its first inroads, and in Thomas Buddenbrook the contradiction becomes intolerable. Existence and awareness confront one another in agonizing equilibrium, and death is the humiliating release. But in Hanno, on the other hand, death is a natural consummation, voluptuously sought by a being at the extreme limit of spiritualization, one in whom art has wholly displaced tradition and whose departing song is a *liebestod* on the model of one of his creator's other great mentors, Wagner.

But if the Schopenhauerian antinomies underlie the novel, it is their Nietzschean resolution that enters in a minor but decisive way and grants a new potential to Mann's art. The Nietzschean will-to-power, in its aspect of the acceptance of a reality beyond the need of meaning or moral justification, appears in Thomas

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Buddenbrook's crucial vision, but is even more centrally affirmed in the sister, Tony, who rides above disaster by ignoring the terms of the conflict. Just as the entire novel, in its subtle irony, modifies the traditional realistic mode, she modifies the antagonisms within it by occupying a space between them; she is a comic creation, a parody of the superman, but also the progenitor of Mann's great figures of reconciliation, Castorp and Joseph.

BEFORE REACHING the post-Schopenhauerian heights of *The Magic Mountain,* Mann underwent a long creative silence, a period of self-questioning, one result of which was the wartime *Reflections of a Non-Political Man.* This never-translated book is a turning-point, and Heller gives considerable space to it. Part of its six hundred pages constitutes a dialogue with Mann's brother Heinrich, the representative *zivilisationsliterat,* the liberal, democratic writer against whom Mann pitted his "tragic, aristocratic, ironical reading of history." But the book is essentially an anguished journey into the self, from which Mann emerged with a new balance of forces, having discovered, as he later said, that "life too yearned—and yearned for the spirit."

The way from *Buddenbrooks* to *The Magic Mountain* had been marked by his growing need to frame the artist-bourgeois encounter in more comprehensive situations, and by the birth of his belief, never free from ironic doubt, in the artist's mediating role between nature and spirit. It was Goethe's influence that had come to overlay the Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean strains. In *The Magic Mountain* illness is still the ally of knowledge and art the tempter to death, but there is a new meliorating principle, a bridge back to life.

The Magic Mountain is Mann's epic of the age's fragmented condition, its loss of meaning and resulting helplessness in the face of multiple possibility. Within this total disharmony Mann sets a total "education," Castorp's "adventures in the flesh and spirit" which together teach him what neither alone could have. His dualistic pairs of mentors—Settembrini and Naptha, Behrens and Krokowski—contend for his soul with their arguments and epistemologies, but it is the book's more sensuous characters, those whose beings rest in prerational depths—Clavdia and Peeperkorn—who educate him most effectively, simply by the radiations of their existence.

Yet such is Mann's irony, Heller says, in one of the stresses he puts on Mann's breakneck balancing act—somewhat to the detriment of his safe arrivals—that Castorp's education remains "hermetic," with no real breakthrough into any of the modes of possibility that have been suggested to him. He is only permitted to nourish a *dream* of love. (Yet that is also an existence and a location beyond irony.)

The form of *The Magic Mountain,* Heller most skilfully shows, is as much its "story" as the events it describes. It is a tale about the difficulty of writing a novel in and about an age so problematic that it is not even sure truth exists. With the greatest mastery Mann therefore embodies Castorp's search among multiple meanings within a style that combines the lyrical and prosaic, the philosophic and scientific, commentary, parody and secret languages (the lovers' French), all of it held together by the ruling influence of the leit-motif. The very form of the novel thus becomes the analogue and realization of its character's research for unity.

THIS IS the moral element in Mann, as Heller says: to preserve form as the "symbol and promise of something absolute and indestructible." Mann once wrote that his work was not the product of an "ascetic-orgiastic denial of life but the ethical aspect of my existence." It was through the creating of form that he could overcome his radical mistrust of the artist's moral status. Such a need for form, for the absolute and indestructible, is religious in the deepest sense, and this truth in turn throws light on the ultimate source of Mann's irony—his "religious conscience and imagination in conflict with a skeptical mind."

In *Joseph,* Mann's imagination wins its greatest triumph over his irony; his most tranquil book, it is also his most meliorating one, a work in which the artist functions in the fullness of his mediating role, bringing together and reconstituting in reciprocity and mutual meaning the antinomies of existence. In forging a re-connection between the separated halves of time, between myth and the present moment, Mann simultaneously resolved those parallel existential dilemmas—the relationship between the individual and typical, the ego and otherness, phenomenon and idea. Over the entire vast work hovers what is perhaps Mann's richest image of reconciliation and wholeness: the revolving sphere whose top and bottom halves continually succeed one another, define each other and maintain each other in existence.

To go from *Joseph* to *Doctor Faustus* is to descend, almost nightmarishly, from art as mediation to its original shape in Mann's primal fear and doubt. In this most tormented and yet most daring of Mann's books, art triumphs in the loneliest of voids, the victory of form takes place at the furthest limit of possibility. For what Mann is questioning in this tragic parody, which *un-writes* Goethe, is the legitimacy of form-in-itself, the legitimacy, that is, of art's purity and self-sufficiency in an age of the utmost precariousness. By having fed more and more off itself, laments Leverkuhn, the composer who has traded his soul for genius, art seems finally to have cut itself off from every living source.

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And yet simply to have written *Doctor Faustus* in some way carried Mann beyond the tragedy. The recrudescence of anguish over art's status—and by extension the status of mind itself in a universe of seemingly chthonic darkness—brought forth the means of assuagement, the power to state the unstatable. *Doctor Faustus,* Erich Heller says, is Mann's eloquent compromise with silence.

Leverkuhn had asked for a break-through from intellectual coldness into "a touch-and-go world of new feeling," which should be the salvation of art. Mann's own great breakthroughs were behind him and he made no new ones. But he recovered from *Doctor Faustus* in a way that perhaps suggests more about the perennial life of art than even such Prometheanism would have done. He entered a last phase of serene "play," in which his work brightened into fantasy and the gentlest irony and was re-informed by something of the humor of *Joseph,* that humor which Kierkegaard describes as "the state of the soul existing at the approaches to faith."

It was as though he were demonstrating, like Shakespeare in his last plays, that art is capable of relaxation, of learning that it is not itself the mover of things, being, after all, only the most sublime, though also the most perilous, of imitations.

ESTHETIC AND MORAL TRUTHS

Literature and Doctrine

by DANIEL J. CALLAHAN

OF THE VARIOUS advertising stratagems employed by publishers, perhaps none is so persistent as the assertion that here is presented the "truth": uncompromising, unabashed, naked truth at that. We are told by fly-leaf and reviewer that so and so dares to speak the truth and that we must arise, shake off our smugness, and meet the challenge. Inevitably, we find our power to respond to such challenges diminishing. For while technique, problems in style, and forms of characterization may occupy us, one of our final judgments as a reader will turn upon the value we assign to an author's perceptions. And, in spite of the fact that advertising frequently offers truth as if it were a commodity, of all the tasks of the critic none is so thorny as that of judging a work of literature in terms of its ultimate truth value.

The extreme difficulties of such a task are made clear in a recent book, *American Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Louisiana. $3.50). Mr. Randall Stewart here applies to the main body of American literature what he calls a "partisan" standard whose tenets are certain central Christian truths. Despite his early assertion that, "since I am a teacher of American literature, I approach the subject of literature and religion from the literary side," it is soon evident that the distinctly literary merits of American writers are not his main concern. Instead, he limits his discussion to the writer's adherence to Christian orthodoxy, particularly as it relates to the nature of man, and says: "I have insisted upon certain tests of Christian orthodoxy—the chief test being a recognition of Original Sin. . . ."

For Mr. Stewart, the concept of tragedy seems to serve as the one link which mediates between religious and esthetic values. The possibility of tragedy, of responsible, fruitful, and redeemable suffering, is seen, therefore, as a fundamental measure of literature; and tragedy finds its metaphysical and religious support in the doctrine of original sin.

With his standard specified, Mr. Stewart traces, through its major historical figures, a continual flux in American literature. At one extreme are those writers whose works essentially deny original sin and the tragic possibilities of human existence: the rationalism of Jefferson, Franklin, and Paine, the deification of man of Emerson and Whitman, and the naturalism of Dreiser, Farrell and Crane, all represent alternatives to Christian orthodoxy. At the other extreme, as an historical as well as ideological antinomy, are those writers whose conception of man embodies, in one form or other, the doctrine of original sin: Jonathan Edwards, Melville, James, Cather, Eliot, Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren. Characteristically, these last-named authors, whom Mr. Stewart calls "reactionary," see that "man is a battleground" and "embodies good and evil."

The implications of this dichotomy bear not only on literature but also on the presuppositions of democracy, for the view here espoused, as opposed to those of some social historians, is that the doctrine of

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original sin provides a better foundation for democracy than does naturalism, romanticism or rationalism. Consequently, theological orthodoxy has given us both esthetically and politically valuable literature.

NEVERTHELESS, the concept of tragedy, however valuable, has a limited range of application in making judgments within this context. For want of a developed justification, on specifically literary grounds, of a judgment of a work of art from a theological standpoint, we are virtually forced to identify literature with catechism, with the Arnoldian notion of literature as a criticism of life. Mr. Stewart, for instance, does not refer directly to the therapeutic or didactic aim of literature, and yet the direction of his analysis strongly suggests that such an aim constitutes its central value. He further implies that a Neo-Orthodox position in formal theology provides the artist with the basic tools for working out the problems of human life in a literary context. As an almost inevitable offspring of his method, the works of political writers as well as religious thinkers and creative artists are evaluated by exactly the same norm, with little allowance being made for their different purposes, tools and subject matter.

But if one protests against the kind of standard here employed (and the main problem is not the highly questionable point of whether original sin is the central Christian doctrine) because it fails to take into serious account esthetic criteria, do we thereby say that the ultimate truth of an author's perception is not a major consideration in judging his work? Or, perhaps, that truth is not one: that there is religious truth, philosophical truth, and esthetic truth and that the creator in any one of the disciplines ought not to be judged by criteria applicable only to another?

These questions are unavoidable, for if we do hold that there are certain absolute truths about man, to deny the legitimacy of Mr. Stewart's approach is to run the dangerous risk of isolating the various human activities. To do this would be to give our deepest principles a very limited field of application. This dilemma is apparent in any serious dispute over censorship and, on the more academic level, is inevitable when those who look to literature primarily as a means of communicating ideas try to establish a common ground with those who see literature only in terms of specialized esthetic judgments. While it may be artless for critics to think of the essential business of their craft as the translation of a point of dogma into a point of esthetics, it is just as artless to maintain that the literal truth of an author's view of man has nothing to do with the quality of his work.

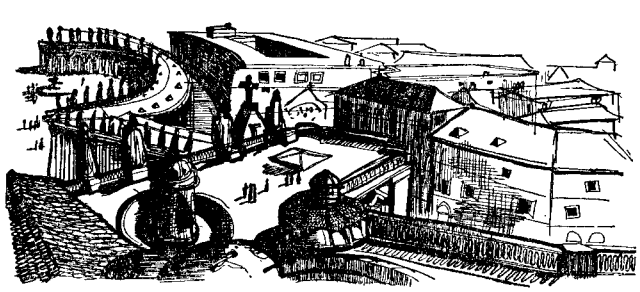
Although a single novel or poem may not itself provide adequate grounds for inferring an author's conception of man—for there may be people like those who populate Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and Jones' *Some Came Running*—it becomes nearly impossible to maintain an esthetic detachment when recurrent themes or one-sided characters make up the whole of an author's canon. Writers are not quite so silent about the truth of things as many critics—and even writers themselves—would have us believe.

NEVERTHELESS, while recognizing the danger of misinterpreting a creative work, it is not merely legitimate but necessary and inevitable, once some sort of value has been assigned to form and technique, to ask if it is true: to ask whether what we take to be an author's fundamental insights do correspond to reality. We can still ask this question even though we may realize that there are many works which make such a question extremely difficult, where the form of the work and the author's insights are as one.

The teacher or critic may attempt to dodge the question and suggest that such an inquiry should be addressed to the philosopher or theologian (who is rarely so scrupulous about passing judgments). It is, however, evident that most serious literature does say things, in its own way, about the nature of man, and any critical position which holds such issues to be irrelevant is necessarily partial and frequently distorted.

The most grave formalists, or those who would give ultimate significance only to purely intrinsic considerations, would surely agree that literature is one way of gaining insight into human life. For that reason it cannot be wholly impertinent to check an author's insight against our own; to question, finally, not simply the coherence of his creation in terms of his own aims and practical skills, but also the correspondence of his construction of man to our own deepest beliefs about the human situation. We cannot always, however sensitive our grasp of esthetic considerations, remain intellectually detached from literature. We cannot because literature is not only verbal or grammatical technique. It is also a way of knowing, a means, as Coleridge says, of working out all relationships. While we may for a time allow ourselves a "willing suspension of disbelief" in reading, for example, André Gide's *The Immoralist*, sooner or later we will question the validity of homosexuality as a way to "sincerity."

If literature is, in practice, one way of gaining insight into human reality then it would be proper to call this a "use" of literature. Literature, whether it be poetry,



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novel or drama, has an essential and accidental multiplicity about it. That is to say, it functions on a number of levels of significance, some having apparently little to do with the abstract meaning or nature of literature. Each level can appeal to different interests of different readers, and be used for different personal ends. The multiple uses, the possibility of different appeals, of a single work of art will often correspond to the multiple meanings which one may discern there. But in many instances there may be no correspondence between meaning and use. It is often the failure to recognize this natural multiplicity of uses which gives rise to conflicting theories of the nature of literature and, equally, to disputes among those, entirely outside the critical profession, who can see literature only from some limited standpoint—only in terms of one of its uses.

The censor, for instance, sees literature primarily as a social force, a conditioner of morals, opinions, and attitudes. The social historian finds in literature a key to the intellectual and social currents of an historical era. The philosopher and the theologian often read creative literature to get, through the eyes of a perceptive observer, a feeling for the actualities of moral and cosmological perplexities. Finally, the literary critic (at least he whose interest is in the thing-in-itself) raises the question, What is a literature? and the related question, What is and ought to be the relationship between the writer and his creation? In asking these questions, the critic attempts at one point or other to cut himself off from the accidental uses or implications of literature. His answers to these questions can, by a slight stretching of conventional usage, be called a "fact" about literature—the essential fact because it is, or is intended to be, entirely independent of how an individual reader or a public may respond to it.

STILL, THE accidental facts about literature are important. Regardless of whether the writer intends to influence morals, record history, or to make vivid and concrete abstract philosophical and religious convictions, all of these possibilities of interpretation are present once the work is in the hands of the reader. For the non-professional reader, no matter what he may be told by the critic about how he ought to approach a work of art, usually sees no reason why he should not make use of literature for the ends that he finds most valuable and significant to him.

Whatever the critic and the writer may say about the obligation of the writer to preserve his integrity and present what he thinks he must present, the censor can always retort with undeniable justification that literature does have moral and social consequences. While we may dispute the censor in his assigning of relative values—public morality as more important than authors and art—we can recognize that he is free to make a moral decision in favor of public morality. So too, the social historian who might be told that his use of literature misses the point of it all, can reply that literature does, in fact, give a good indication of what was happening during an era and that that is what interests him and serves his purposes.

In this sense, there is only one thing not allowable to us: to make use of, or judge, a creative work without taking into account as part of our over-all evaluation its nature in its own right. We can if we like read Virginia Woolf and Dostoevsky for philosophical content, and judge the former deficient. Or we can read them for sheer literary artistry and judge the latter deficient. Further, we can, if it appears helpful, attempt to determine whether, say, a body of poetry provides data for historical theorizing and sociological monographs.

But we can only do this legitimately if we are willing and able to admit that our partisan use or evaluation must be the result of a personal intellectual or moral decision in full recognition of the dangerous consequences that our decision involves. The main danger is that of systematically blinding ourselves to other, and frequently more important, values.

To use literature *in general* as a way to truth or as an index or mover of society is surely permissible as long as one is flexible enough, with any given work, to see it for what it is first of all. And to see a work for what it is will mean frequently that our use or way of evaluation must be suspended to give way for greater values. System-building with regard to defining and pointing out the essence of literature is, quite obviously, necessary if we are to give any sense to our employment and application of the word. But to build systems according to the contingent uses of literature or even according to one aspect in particular of what is essential to it cannot, without unjustifiable distortion, be done at all. We can, at most, be methodical only in a clearly provisional and sporadic way, allowing gaps, exceptions and even, in rare cases, apparent contradictions. For there have always been and most probably always will be, a few literary masterpieces with which hardly anyone would "agree," but which everyone would praise for their striking success in realizing values other than that of unconditional truth.

WHEN DEW DRIPPED SILVER

When dew dripped silver from each peach-blown
bough
I knew to me life had been gentle.
Now
as the evening tells her coronal of stars
a touch of your departed presence bars
life's gentleness.
I have grown old somehow.

SISTER MARY HONORA, O.S.F.

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THE SCREEN

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD

FILM-MAKERS have many ways of looking at war. Three current movies, although by no means all-inclusive, illustrate three different approaches.

"Onionhead" belongs to the funny-sad school in which "Mr. Roberts" and "South Pacific" were better examples. Andy Griffith plays a college boy who joins the Coast Guard because he has no luck with the girls. Although he has never cooked before, he is naturally assigned as a cook and anyone can predict the rest. His arguments with the chief cook are amusing enough, but our hero's struggles with his assistants, with the stoves and with a batch of dough in which he's put too much yeast will win laughs only if you are in the mood for slapstick.

Then, too, the love and sex parts of the picture do not fit into this comedy scheme very well. Still hurt from being turned down by his college girl (Erin O'Brien), Andy spends a lot of time looking for a new girl and finally finds attractive and willing Stella. However, it soon becomes obvious, to the audience at least, that Stella is a nymphomaniac and no subject for humor—a role very well played by Felicia Farr, who gives a certain poignancy to the portrayal, especiallly after Stella marries the rough-and-tumble chief cook. Walter Matthau is excellent as this illiterate character who is madly in love with his wife but not too understanding of what's going on. And Griffith is good too in the lead role; he is getting rather old for the college kid stuff, but he has appeal as the bumbling cook who does the best he can and even takes on a sense of duty when he discovers his executive officer (Ray Danton) is cheating with the company books. All in all, though, "Onionhead" is an uneven film with a strange mixture of good fun, corny humor and delicate subject matter that deserves more serious handling than it can receive in a comedy about the Coast Guard.

IN THE SEMI-DOCUMENTARY class is the English film, "Dunkirk," which celebrates the famous big pick-up on the Channel Coast after the Germans ripped through Belgium in early 1940 and pushed the British and French soldiers to the beaches. Although Michael Balcon's production is good, his picture runs much too long, jumping back and forth to establish the attitude of civilians in England toward "the phoney war" and the attitude of Tommies in Belgium who see nothing phoney about their situation.

Three actors stand out of the large cast: John Mills

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as a corporal who has to lead his detail to Dunkirk; Bernard Lee as a discouraged journalist in London who is trying to find out just what the big shots are up to; and Richard Attenborough as a buckle manufacturer whose only interest in the war is in connection with his profits. Director Leslie Norman contrasts these three men effectively, but unfortunately he spares us no details. Throughout the film, old newsreel footage adds authenticity, the shots of the small boats and pleasure-craft setting out from England to aid in the big rescue are excellent, and thousands of extras are used for scenes done on a grand scale. As a result, the ultimate climax in "Dunkirk" has a realism that makes the same episode in "Mrs. Miniver" look like moonlight-and-roses, but nonetheless the film becomes wearing because it is so drawn out. Even the moviegoers who come to cheer this heroic evacuation may be bored long before the beaches are cleared.

STILL A THIRD cinematic approach to war is found in another English film, "Tank Force," which sees the whole bloody mess as an adventure. Obviously not meant to be taken too seriously, "Tank Force" tells the story of five men who escape from a German and Italian P.O.W. camp in the Libyan desert in 1942. The backgrounds are properly sandy and rugged, and the cast, led by Leo Genn, Victor Mature and Bonar Colleano, is good, but the adventures are awfully Rover Boy-ish; and most of the excitement is too contrived and exaggerated to hold one's interest. The main events are sandwiched between two elaborately staged tank battles, but even these seem so haphazard and impersonal that the war could be taking place on the planet Mars.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

COMMUNICATIONS

C. S. LEWIS AND SPACE

Newport, R. I.

TO THE EDITORS: In your issue of September 26th, Mr. Charles M. Herzfeld gives us a clear and apparently well-informed summary of the technical achievements of the enthusiasts for space-travel during the year just passed ["Space Year I"]. I wish he were equally well-informed and equally clear as to the mental workings of those who are not enthusiasts for space travel. He seems to make no attempt to understand a point of view that is so foreign to his own, and implies that such non-enthusiasts are merely unaware of what is going on, or unwilling to think about what is unfamiliar, and that they "dismiss the whole challenge [of the Space Age] on a note of condemnation and ridicule." The dichotomy between good and bad, he tells us, struck by Mr. C. S. Lewis in his well-known trilogy—good traditionalists versus power-mad scientists—"is a false one, and obscures the real problems."

The trilogy of Mr. Lewis is of course fiction, and frankly fantastic fiction at that, and fiction is not the best place to look for philosophical justifications. A study of *The Abolition of Man* would have brought Mr. Herzfeld closer to Mr. Lewis' intellectual foundations. I will not here try to speak for Mr. Lewis, but as a fellow non-enthusiast I ask leave to speak for myself with some confidence that Mr. Lewis would not widely disagree.

The difference between the Herzfelds and the Lewises may be described from many points of view, from which I shall select three:—biology, ecology, and theology.

Biologists tell us that every species of plant or animal can exist only in a certain kind of environment, outside of which it is eliminated by its unfitness for survival. Although selective breeding can change a species superficially, only a mutation can produce a new species, which might be adapted to a different environment. Species that have been changed in outward form without a mutation—high-producing cows, race horses, showy varieties of flowers etc.—are less hardy and more liable to disease and sterility than are the original unchanged forms of the same species. (A recent example of this last point is the fact that the malformations due to radioactive dust in the air that were observed in England in 1957 were found among domestic rather than wild plants. The natural plants were better able to resist the tendency to malformation.) And finally, the old biological standby, "acquired characteristics are not inherited." In sum, animals and plants become progressively less able to survive as they are environed by conditions to which their species is not naturally adjusted. I know of no reason to suppose that the organism man is exempted in any way from these general biological laws.

Ecologists study, and seek to draw our attention to, the orderly pattern of nature as a whole. They see nature not as the early Darwinians did, an anarchy of struggling rivals red of tooth and claw, but as Prince Peter Kropotkin did, as an orderly system of organisms each serving and being served by others. Our Darwinian inheritance makes it hard for the unscientific person to grasp such a seemingly fantastic idea, but scientists prefer evidence. Students of ecology are particularly interested in what happens when natural symbiotic patterns are upset, and in warning men of commerce and politics of the disastrous effects of many of their practices. (As one example among thousands, the presence of nitrogen in the air depends on a cycle of micro-organisms, the disappearance of any one of which would quickly cause the death of all air-breathing species. There is reason to believe that these micro-organisms may be vulnerable to radioactivity.)

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Theologians tell us that it was the act of an omniscient and benevolent intelligence that brought the universe into being, and that man's self-will is the cause of all human miseries. If we accept this as true, we can see the way to happiness only in the closest possible conformity we can achieve with the intentions of that intelligence. Our Christian moral life is rooted in this corollary. If we really believe that the creative mind is not a fable, but exists and is incalculably greater than that of the wisest and most learned man, are we not more justified in trying to build an environment for mankind which is best suited to its ascertainable needs and nature, rather than in attempting to establish the boundaries and limits of its possible life?

There are doubtless exceptions, but as far as the ordinary citizen can see the space-travel enthusiasts are not conspicuous for their wisdom. Dr. Teller's desire "to see the other side of the moon" is soberly advanced as a typical argument for the expenditure of millions. When a little boy opens his father's watch with a hammer, and gives a similar reason, we call it an infantile one. Space-travel enthusiasts do not approach the universe with awe but with the arrogance of conquerors. Their thinking is enslaved by an unproved and improbable hypothesis of indefinite mechanical progress. We need advisers with a better grasp of philosophy.

With a rapidly mounting population, we have not yet seriously tackled the problem of a perennial food supply, and we are asked to dream of voyages to other stellar systems. "It will cost two billion dollars to put a man on the moon." Space-travel non-enthusiasts wonder whether it would not be more prudent, more religious, and more humane, to spend such a sum on a study of the problems which our pride, our avarice, and our love of comfort have already brought down upon our fellow men and fellow women.

It would be interesting to know whether or not human survival is possible on the planet Mars, but more interesting still to know whether it will in the future be possible on the planet Tellus.

GRAHAM CAREY.

AN APPEAL

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Matter-of-Fact Confession of a Non-Penitent

LOLITA. By Vladimir Nabokov. Putnam. $5.

By THOMAS MOLNAR

THERE MAY yet develop, in literary and legal circles, a "*Lolita* case," as there has been a case of *Ulysses* and of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. This does not mean that Nabokov's book reminds me of either; if similarities are to be searched for, I would think of the eighteenth-century *Les Liaisons dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos, and, nearer to us, Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull*.

Lolita is a confession too, although certainly not of a penitent. It is far less matter-of-fact than Laclos' novel which is, like *Lolita*, the narrative of two systematically planned seductions by an older man, one of his victims being a sixteen-year-old girl, conquered under the eyes of her young fiancé.

Lolita's originality is that it speaks of the unspeakable in such a manner that it becomes credible, understandable, almost normal. As Lionel Trilling says, the reader simply cannot work up sufficient indignation; instead, he remains an amused observer, a sophisticated peeping Tom. Austere censors may, of course, warn him of the sensuous atmosphere in which the story is immersed, the quasi-incestuous relationship between Humbert Humbert, a scholarly, analytical-minded, very good looking "big hunk of a man," and his twelve-year old stepdaughter, the boyish-girlish "nymphet," Lolita. The censor's case is even better when he points out that this rapport borders on the horrifying since Humbert marries Lolita's mother in order to be closer to the child, and becomes the involuntary cause of his wife's death which gives him access to the nymphet's—no longer innocent—bed.

More than one bed, many beds. The last two-thirds of the novel is a fantastic journey through the forty-eight States, through motels, hotels, lodges, and rented homes, the dreary, uniform scenes of desperate love-makings and furtive side-glances at suspicious innkeepers, hotel guests, and chambermaids. In an epilogue Nabokov relates that some twenty years ago he had developed the basic plot in a short story. One can easily imagine that in such a form, appropriately pointed, the theme may have been morbid and obscene, with the hero, like Dostoevsky's Svidrigailov, a grim seducer of children. But in a book of more than three hundred pages, *Lolita's* narrator cannot remain such a figure.

Humbert is a feather-weight intellectual, with his point of gravity situated below the belt; but he becomes a tragic—although at the same time comic—character in his pursuit of an impossible happiness for the morsels of which he pays an ever higher price of self-debasement, humiliation, and remorse. The depth of his personal inferno is aptly measured by two episodes: the moment when Lolita, still unaware of her mother's death, finds her new stepfather in her own bed, intent like a lover, fearful and humble like a dog waiting to be patted; then that other moment, this time one of painful reminiscence, when Humbert recalls the picture of himself, having just possessed Lolita and now adoring in her the suffering, debauched child, but with lust again rising in him, imperious, demanding submission.

The central question the reader ought to ask of himself is whether he feels pity for the girl. Our ethical ideal would require that we look at Lolita as a sacrificial lamb, that we become, in imagination, her knight-protector. Yet this is impossible for two reasons. One is very simple: before yielding to Humbert, the girl had had a nasty little affair with a nasty little thirteen-year-old in an expensive summer camp. Besides, she is a spoiled sub-teenager with a foul mouth, a self-offered target for lechers, movie-magazine editors, and corrupt classmates. The second reason is that throughout their not-quite-sentimental journey, Lolita remains as unknown to us as to Humbert himself, seen only in bed or in the car, existing only through the lustful gaze of her stepfather. She remains an object, perhaps even to herself, and only at the very end, as a teen-age mother, married to a simpleton and comically serious in her vulgarity, does she become human, no longer a corrupt little animal, and no longer a nymphet.

Yet both she and Humbert, her mother and friends, the many people we pass by in the lust-and-anguish-driven car, form a fantastic, wonderful cavalcade of humanity, described, analyzed, judged with incomparable virtuosity. It has been said that this book has a high literary value; it has much more; a style, an individuality, a brilliance which may yet create a tradition in American letters.

This is because Nabokov's writing has the rare quality of dominating the reader, body and mind, his curiosity and fears, his capacity for pity, amusement, tears and laughter. The author rides with him up-hill and down-vale, enmeshes him in the marvels of a description, or entertains him, as a veritable mental juggler, with the urbane tricks of a cultured conversationalist.

Mr. Nabokov complains in the epilogue that he had to abandon his wonderfully rich, flexible and docile Russian for an English in which he can be no better than second rate. Never have I heard of such false, although likable, modesty! Mr. Nabokov's English is beautiful and immensely suggestive, espousing with the greatest ease the mood of men, the color of landscapes, the ambiance of motels, girls' schools, and small towns. It is an ocean of a language, now calm, limpid, transparent, then turning into a roar, with waves upon waves of scintillating metaphors, images, innovations, allusions. The author swims in this ocean like a smooth-bodied fish, leaving the pursuer-reader amidst a thousand delights.

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Grace and Power

THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF EDITH WHARTON. Introduction by Wayne Andrews. Scribner's. $4.50.

By ANNE FREMANTLE

WAYNE ANDREWS' introduction to his selection of Edith Wharton's stories will, the dust jacket promises, "ultimately be incorporated in a biography of Edith Wharton to be published by Harper and Bros." Meanwhile it is valuable for many reasons, not the least because it brings out into open literary view three of the whisperings that have been current anent Edith Wharton these many years: that she knew herself to be illegitimate; that she was divorced; and that the love of her life was Walter Van Rensselaer Berry, "an attorney who sat as a judge on the international tribunals of Egypt and settled in Paris for the rest of his life."

She had known him before her own marriage, but only when she was forty-six did she know, briefly, "what it was to be happy (as a woman understands happiness)." That spring of 1908 in Paris she wrote "I am a little humbled, a little ashamed, to find how poor a thing I am, how the personality I had molded into such strong firm lines has crumbled to a pinch of ashes in this flame! For the first time in my life *I can't read* . . . I hold the book in my hand and see your name all over the page." But a month later she returned to America, and to her husband. He gradually went out of his mind, and by 1910 had to be placed in an asylum on Lake Constance. In 1913 the Whartons were divorced, but Edward Robbins Wharton did not die until 1928—one year after Walter Berry had died, a bachelor, Edith Wharton felt of the latter's demise that "the stone closed over all my life." For days "she jealously guarded his ashes; finally his remains were interred . . . at Versailles". In August, 1937, she was buried close to him.

It was all quite discreet, quite ladylike, and few people knew; the end is as wry as one of her own stories—"Roman Fever," perhaps, or "The Other Two" or "Souls Belated" or "Autre Temps." This latter story shows that Edith Wharton, for all her own feelings about divorce was aware of the new generation that frames its divorce papers and hangs them in the toilet, that says of their daughter's wedding that the groom will "do" for a first husband and that expects the one left to withdraw from social life, while the "guilty" pair are feted everywhere as most romantic. . . .

But, strangely enough, Edith Wharton's best stories are not about the kind of people she knew socially. Her best are *Ethan Frome*—an almost flawless classic, worthy the praise Henry James paid its author: "A beautiful art of tone and truth—a beautiful, artful rightdownness and yet effective cumulation. It's a *gem*," and *The Bunner Sisters*, with Mr. Ramy the German watchmaker courting them both in a New York tenement; and *Madame de Treymes*, written with a background as different from Edith Wharton's own as either of the other: aristo, Catholic France. Her greatest novels, *The Custom of the Country* and *The House of Mirth* lack the polish of these *novelles*: they sag a little. But what a lovely craftsman she is—to read her is like watching some really feminine tennis player winning at Wimbledon; the grace and the power make a most agreeable combination.

An Inner Life

DESCRIPTION OF A STRUGGLE. By Franz Kafka. Translated by Tania and James Stern. Schocken Books. $4.50.

By MORRIS PHILIPSON

CONTRIBUTING toward the goal of making the complete works of Kafka available in English is this new edition of a book published in German first in 1936, some twelve years after Kafka's death. It contains more than a dozen very

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short pieces, three stories, and the only work Kafka wrote in the form of a dramatic act.

The scene from a play, "The Warden of the Tomb," is an inconclusive piece, but it creates a suggestive symbol in the story of the guardian of a royal sepulcher, who has to fight, every night, against the dead who want to break out of the tomb. One can draw the implication that what we learn from the dead is: it is *this life* which is paradise.

Nevertheless, there are those who live it badly. "Blumfeld, the Elderly Bachelor" is a fragment about an aging clerk who is incapable of maintaining personal relations even with a pair of bouncing balls. The "magical" balls are the only fantastic touch in an otherwise naturalistic piece of writing. In "The Refusal," where the style has the character of abstraction, the classic economy and the rich symbolism of *The Castle,* a group of citizens in a tiny and poor town asks a favor from the colonel who governs them. The request is refused; but, we are told, this is exactly what everyone expected and needed. "The strange fact," Kafka writes, "is that without this refusal one simply cannot get along. . . ." This is reminiscent of Kafka's lines:

"Leopards break into the temple and drink the sacrificial chalices dry; this occurs repeatedly, again and again; finally it can be reckoned on beforehand and becomes a part of the ceremony."

This is precisely the general effect of Kafka's works—to offer a sense of what is "part of the ceremony," even if it is totally unreasonable or incomprehensible.

While the shortest pieces, like Goya's horror-wit etchings of his old age, exert the fascination of surrealist snapshots, the title story, "Description of a Struggle," reads like the scenario for a surrealist movie. Kafka wrote it at the age of twenty. What is the struggle about? Who are the battlers? There is the narrator "I," "the Fat Man," and "the Supplicant." There is vivid imagery and plangent rhetoric; but, on first reading, it seems unintelligible.

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FROM KARL MARX TO JESUS CHRIST

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"Very different from the sort of work generally written by a man who has given up Communism . . . Highly recommended to all intelligent and sensitive readers." *Virginia Kirkus Bulletin.* $3.75

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The Supplicant explains why he allows the narrator to question him about the way he prays. "I hope to learn from you," he says, "how things really are, why it is that around me things sink away like fallen snow . . ." Later, the "I" addresses the sky, the town square, the moon, and God with the question: "What is it that makes you all behave as though you were real? Are you trying to make me believe I'm unreal . . .?" The key to this dream-like montage story is the idea of struggling to discover reality. It would seem obvious that what is described here are not relations between people but a vision of inner life, a dialogue made possible by personifying the conflicting elements of one's Self. In his *Diary* entry of August 6, 1914, Kafka calls this, "My preoccupation with portraying my dreamlike inner life. . . ."

It should be mentioned that Kafka's publisher is somewhat disingenuous to announce this book as a volume of stories "presented for the first time in English translation," when, as a matter of fact, the best section of the title story is the first selection in the book *The Penal Colony,* and "The Hunter Gracchus" appeared in *The Great Wall of China.* An editorial note would have been valuable, since the texts are not identical.

In this version of the "Struggle" there is an extremely moving passage in which the Supplicant says: "People who live alone have no responsibility in the evening. One fears a number of things—that one's body could vanish . . . that it might be a good idea to go to church and pray at the top of one's voice in order to be looked at and acquire a body." The struggle appears to be the battle within one's Self to achieve some conviction of one's own reality.

Kafka, writing in his own voice elsewhere, says, *writing* is "a form of prayer." And belief in one's reality requires real involvement with the lives of others. "To be alone," Kafka wrote in his *Diary,* "brings nothing but punishment." Kafka, as a social being may have valued real relations with other

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persons more than he did his writings, but the literary genius suffered the paradox of the millionaire who wants to be loved for "himself."

An Easy Fantasy

SO LOVE RETURNS. By Robert Nathan. Knopf. $3.50.

By EDWIN KENNEBECK

MR. ROBERT NATHAN, who is quite a prolific author (his works include *One More Spring* and *Portrait of Jenny,* and a publisher's note says that he has written "some thirty-six" volumes of prose and poetry) with a style that is often pungent, witty, and pleasant, here tries once again a story about a phantom girl. In this novel a California ondine appears near the Pacific Coast home of a writer of children's books. The writer, who narrates the story himself, is the father of a small boy and girl; their mother is recently dead. The ghostly sea-nymph is in some ways similar to the dead woman; between her erratic appearances and disappearances she endears herself to the writer and to his children because of these similarities and because of her beauty and kindness. The narrator is quite slow to realize that she is a sea-creature, even though, through his own words, the reader knows this almost right away —a strange and disheartening trick of style. But toward the end of the brief story the man comes to his senses and sees her for the mysterious being that she is, just before she goes away forever.

Well, she doesn't *really* go away forever; she remains, he believes, in the air somewhere. Mr. Nathan, by way of endowing his fairy tale with Significance, brings in a quotation from a Bernard of Trèves: "About you and around you the air, the earth, and the sea are filled with God's creatures. They are not always visible. . . . These . . . are God's messengers." And in case you find the use of the quotation a little dubious, you have only to look back

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at the story for a confirmation of it! Thinking about this is likely to make the reader feel that he is going around in a circle, and that somehow the author is trying to have his cake and sell it too.

So Love Returns is decorated here and there with sentimento-philosophical observations such as "There are many mysteries in the world, from the stars in their multitide to the way of spiders" and "I felt the emptiness of space above me and below me. . . . How lonely man is in the face of that immense emptiness." These are remarks to which nearly every conscious human subscribes, but the right to use them costs a heavier price than this novel pays. However, *So Love Returns* is not a serious work of fiction, and probably it is not fair to judge it as one, despite the authoritative tone of its title and despite its calling upon Bernard of Trèves.

There are doubtless many readers of "light" fiction who will enjoy yet another short, easy fantasy; this one is for them. Sometimes these readers say of a writer—*Twentieth Century Authors* mentions it in connection with Mr. Nathan—that he is not "highbrow" but is an excellent "craftsman." If there can be an explanation of this distinction, *So Love Returns* is probably the kind of novel that can suggest it.

Defeat by Truth

THE PALACE GUARD. By Donald Braider. Viking. $3.95.

By ALICE ELLEN MAYHEW

WHEN ONE of America's foremost novelists dies a suicide, his funeral in the upstate New York town where he was born and spent his last five years, is attended by a few hundred curious spectators, some acquaintances, and, in the first few rows, his intimates, the "palace guard." They are assorted literati, publishers, sophisticates, mistresses, hangers-on: those who, professedly, adored the late genius. They had stood at his shoulder

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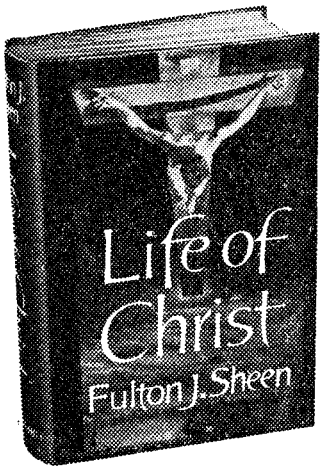

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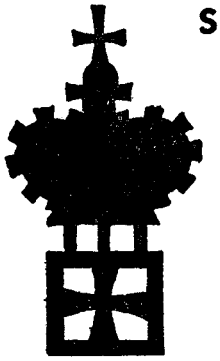

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waiting for the next page to drop and were quick to spread the legend of Payson Hughes; they would be bored without him.

One of the characters opines that it is the function of the palace guard, at last, to slaughter the king. Donald Braider suggests that this was the case: the genius, driven by demands from within and without, beyond endurance, ends by leaving a note that says only, "I've had a belly full." Mr. Braider fails to make his case. At times, it seems that Payson Hughes may have had a belly full of himself. His own sharp honesty seems to suggest this.

Mr. Braider opens his novel at the funeral of the author. One of the coterie, Charles Swanson, who fancies himself Boswell to Hughes' Johnson, is, as the dead man had predicted, first in the biography sweepstakes. It is enlightening to see him move about the funeral party (read *party*, literally) arranging interviews with the many bereaved.

This is the man that emerges: He is caught between his vision and talent as an artist, for which he was adored, and his own restless need for constant reassurance, which came to him easily from all sorts of people. On the one hand, obsessed with the difference between achievement and dream which constantly lengthens; on the other, trying to be all things to all men. His dream was to remain an individual but, to many he seemed merely an individualist. He was a great writer. Testifying to this are an older "popular" novelist, a scholarly Englishman, a young writer, his publisher, agent and the weight of world opinion. He won the Nobel Prize. (To Stockholm went his reply: "Thank you very much.") He never wrote another line for publication. Having conquered every woman in sight, he sunk into despair when, grown older, he thought he was losing them.

The argument here might run two ways. He was failed, if not betrayed, by his friends when, after a lifetime of giving, he needed help. On the other side, his life carried the seeds of his own ineluctable self-destruction. All the palace

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guard and the author tend toward the more sentimental view.

What killed Payson Hughes was the realization that his courtiers no longer blew their noses when he sneezed. The rugged Payson Hughes who, alone of his generation, had not vanished into respectability, came to need his coterie more than they needed him. Self-knowledge brought pathos. The balance of need had shifted to the author's side. The word he could not utter was *please* but he was not sufficient to himself. He was forced to the level of ordinary men and, from this moment on, suicide became a matter of policy. He wore his fate like a suit of clothes but, with honesty. It is not fantastic that Payson Hughes has been well-loved. The man who had lived by the dictum: "I don't know. I want to know, but I don't know," ends it, in truth, not with a cryptic note, but with an entry in his diary and a note to a friend. "I am afraid of the empty darkness of my room." "I'm bored with myself, but having gone this far without God, I should find it awkward having to sit down and eat my orderly skepticism, line by line." Mr. Braider builds his story dramatically as each of the group discovers his own part in the framework. The alter-ego, Swanson, who has set out to discover the real Hughes, discovers himself—much to his horror. But it is the character of Payson Hughes, seen through so many eyes, that is the unifying force. Neither hero nor villain, or maybe, uniquely both, his moment of truth, because he was not prepared for it, proved fatal.

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lowing thirty-four years, Vincent Whelton becomes, Father, Monsignor, Bishop and almost, but not, an Archbishop. As Father Whelton pursues his priestly career as curate, prison chaplain, founder and director of a C. Y. C. center in Lakeport and as the right-hand man of the aging Cardinal Wagner, he befriends and benefits, opposes and shocks a goodly number of lay and clerical Catholics.

There is a scene of the American herarchy in conference; another of the president of a union bringing a stubborn vice-president-at-large into line on a matter of affiliation; there is a killing during Prohibition and a strike at a paper-box factory. All this during the twenties and thirties when the American Church was making a forced march (it just seemed slow) to maturity.

Fathers Whelton, Wagner and Lambert—the three priests of the title—represent the first of the native clergy in America. Ordained just before World War I, Father Whelton returned from his chaplaincy to a world of new things. His own temperament and the lack of lay competence led him to assume leadership in a field which is properly that of laymen. The laity in *Three Priests* and the laity of today differ in that the former made up, to speak loosely, a class as well as a cult. Only a very few were, even economically, of the upper middle class and even those showed that excessive deference to the clergy which is a sign of insecurity. There is one scene in which Monsignor Whelton coaxes pledges of ten, fifteen and twenty thousand dollars from penniless politicians and hard working racketeers to further the Cardinal's building campaign.

There is more than humor in all of this. Mr. Dever has managed to create a character, Father Whelton, who is both American and Catholic in a profoundly *common* way: unlike Fathers Wagner and Lambert, he did not study in Rome; he is not an intellectual; he is a persuasive speaker who is given to lapses of grammar, and he is a bit impatient, even imprudent. As I interpret the novel, this slight im-

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prudence is the reason why he was not appointed ordinary of Lakeport.

Father Whelton, then, to use a phrase he was fond of, is a new "type and kind of" churchman. No less Catholic than his colleagues in Europe and Ireland, he is noticeably different. He does not think in Latin; he is more interested in successful unionism than in the Spanish war; and, finally, democracy, for him, is not a recent thing of doubtful origin but the very climate of his acts and thoughts.

One aspect of the period that Mr. Dever hardly touches, however—perhaps he thinks it's been touched on too often by others—is the challenge to their faith which many intelligent Catholics had to meet. I don't mean from Marxism alone or any of its variants, but from the culture as a whole. That, however, is a quibble. A novelist is not an historian. Mr. Dever has treated a large and important subject with honesty and insight.

Something remains to be said of style. Mr. Dever has none—which I mean, quite sincerely, to be a backhanded compliment. Unless one is a great novelist, the effort to achieve a style often results in violence to one's subject. But Mr. Dever is so devoted to his subject, to a certain notion of "realism," that he very seldom allows his imagination the freedom, and even recklessness, which it needs if it is to create something new. Great novelists are rare, however, and if I have to choose between the way of Dever, and James T. Farrell, and that of Stylists who shine up their one talent only to let it tarnish rather than expose it to experience —well, I'll take Dever's.

REVIEWERS

Thomas Molnar is a member of the faculty at Brooklyn College, New York.

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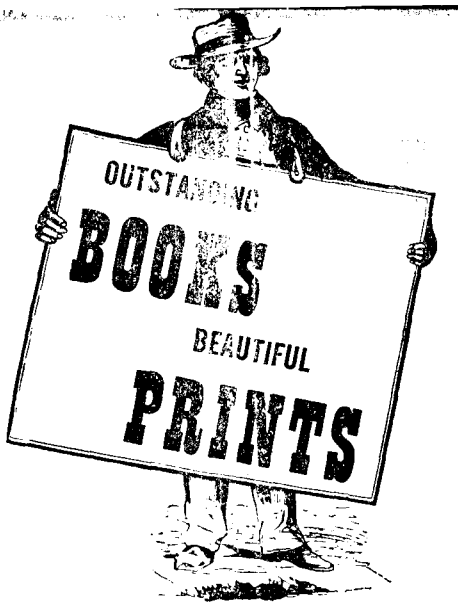

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